

"Proof-Revising" With Podcasting: Keeping Readers in Mind as Students Listen To and Rethink Their Writing

Anne Davis, Ewa McGrail

Proof-revising is a complex literacy task that requires practice with a real audience in an authentic writing context, and activities such as classroom blogs and podcasts can help.

Picture a class of fifth-grade bloggers who have just published stories on their individual blogs, based on dynamic photographs taken by a retired school teacher who was a frequent commenter on the student blogs. Students used a great deal of imagination, had fun composing, and were making good connections. One element was missing though—proofreading—to turn their writing into clear, well-organized, and engaging stories for their readers. Students insisted they had reviewed their stories; however, their idea of proofreading involved quick glances over the story. The teacher challenged the students to improve their writing for their readers through the use of technology for more effective proofreading and revising.

All teachers encourage elementary students to check their spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Students are also asked to be sure the story flows and makes sense. Elementary students, however, often lack an understanding of how their writing comes across to readers. In our project, students were experiencing and learning to communicate with a real audience through blogging. Blogging is a motivator for students to write better, as they have an extended audience with whom to connect (Penrod, 2007). Teachers in Felix's (2007) recent study on blogging

agreed, "[Students] seem to be more motivated to do their best when they know they are publishing for a worldwide audience" (p. 157).

With this motivating force in place, we proposed a different approach—using teacher podcasts to assist students in proofreading and revision. In our context, the blogging teacher recorded all the podcasts; however, parents or paraprofessionals could assist.

Proof-Revising as a Complex Literacy

For most people, proofreading is associated with "making sentence-level revisions" that include "checking for errors of grammar, punctuation, spelling, citations, word choice and...also finding typographical errors" (Chromik, 2002, p. 1). The underlying assumption is that if the product requires work, it involves primarily fixing mechanical and usage errors. Because proofreading for surface errors alone is unlikely to help student writers to appreciate their audience's needs as readers, we offer a combination of proofreading and revision in our podcasting approach. We call this process "proof-revising."

A podcast is an audio recording that can be posted on a student's blog. The podcasting and blogging technologies engage two senses, hearing and seeing. In addition, audio and text are merged through the voice of a reader, rather than that of the student. The audio recording by the teacher, acting as a reader, helps students experience firsthand the reader's reaction to their writing. Such reading shows them where their writing is not understood and where it is enjoyable, engaging, and clear for readers. Proof-revising

in this way creates for student writers the opportunity to “listen for meaning as a stranger listens,” which involves attending to “what is actually written, not to what the author intended to say” (Hanna, 1962, p. 482).

The goal is to make students willing to *rethink and revise* their writing to make it not only clear and precise but also engaging for readers. Rowe (1998) complained about the challenge of “getting students to *revise* their writing” (p. 100, emphasis in the original). We believe that this initial reluctance may be overcome when student writers themselves come to realize that even though what they have written may read as clear and engaging to them, it may not be perceived in the same way by their readers. Our podcasts of student writing test the communicative effectiveness of their prose for the reader. As Rowe (1998) put it, “Students need to understand that the good ideas in their heads must be communicated effectively in order to be understood by their readers” (p. 101). How can we help students develop such understanding?

Our answer to this question is to teach students proof-revising, a process that is both revision and copyediting. While revision calls for rethinking and rewriting their work to produce effective and engaging writing for readers, copyediting leaves writing free from mechanical and usage errors. As students step outside themselves and begin to identify with the audience and their needs as readers, they begin to comprehend the big picture of how their writing comes across to their blog readers. Students also learn about the power they have over the written language to make their writing clear, precise, and engaging to their readers (Rowe, 1998).

Auditory input plays a critical role. Like text-to-speech software, podcasts help students “to listen to drafts to improve their logic and fluency” (Hecker & Engstrom, 2005). However, unlike typical voice recognition software that does the work for students—the program transcribes students’ readings of text to text—podcasts engage students actively. This is because listening to podcasts requires students to analyze and modify their writing to make it clearer. Through actively comparing and adjusting their writing to the reader’s reaction, students develop the metacognitive skills of monitoring, diagnosing, revising, and editing—skills critical for improving the quality of their writing (Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam, van den Bergh, & van Hout-Walters, 2004). The podcasting

approach creates a multisensory process and the student receives prompt feedback. These components, and the high expectations from the teacher, create an environment that promotes learning.

Scaffolding the Technology and the Proof-Revising Process

To probe students’ understanding of proofreading, the teacher asked these questions: “When you proofread, do you use any resources such as a dictionary, spell checker, or someone else?” “When you make changes in your writing, are they usually small or big changes?” “How do you know that your readers understand what you mean?” From students’ responses, the teacher learned that the process involved only a quick reread, and most felt their writing was good. Students reported having used computer spell-checking, reminders from teachers, peer editors, and worksheets. They rarely asked themselves if their readers understood. Their focus was on small changes involving mechanical errors. Our approach was to offer specific and personalized feedback through teacher podcasts of each story. The teacher introduced the rationale for the podcasting approach in the following way: “When you listen to a story read aloud by someone else, it helps you hear things as they are specifically written. When you proof with your eyes only, you read it like you think you wrote it. You don’t always catch errors.”

Teacher podcasts were initially personal communications between student and teacher. They provided a model that was influential in developing proof-revising that is reader centered but in a “writerly” manner (Swenson, Young, McGrail, Rozema, & Whitin, 2006, p. 256). That is, the students were asked to review their writing in light of their readers’ needs—being able to understand, follow, and enjoy the creativity and imagination embedded within that writing. Then the podcasts, a personal communication between student and teacher, were published on a blog, making the process transparent for other educators and students to consider for their use. If students were to create proof-revising podcasts for their peers, direct teacher instruction of this process would be necessary. For a student to read a paper correctly word-for-word, as it is written through the voice of another reader, requires practice.

Constructing a podcast is easy. All you need are a computer with a microphone, some recording software such as Audacity, and a driver such as LAME (2006) to export a podcast project to MP3 format. Both software pieces can be downloaded free from the Internet at audacity.sourceforge.net/ and audacity.sourceforge.net/help/faq?s=install&item=lame-mp3.

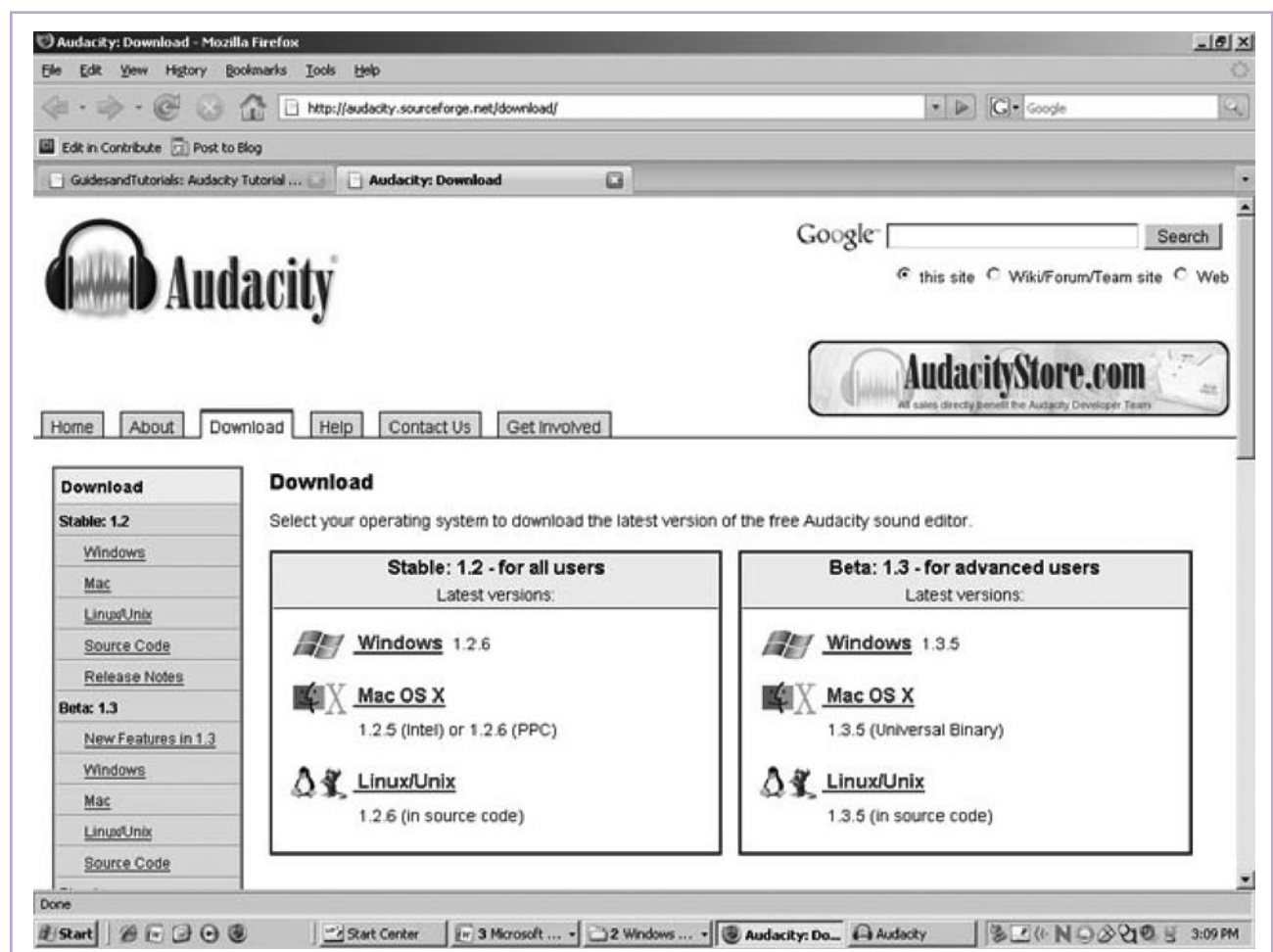
The basic steps to record MP3s using Audacity are as follows:

1. Download the Audacity Program. (Figure 1)
2. Open Audacity, click the pink Record button to begin talking and recording your story, and

click the yellow stop button when you finish recording the story. (Figure 2)

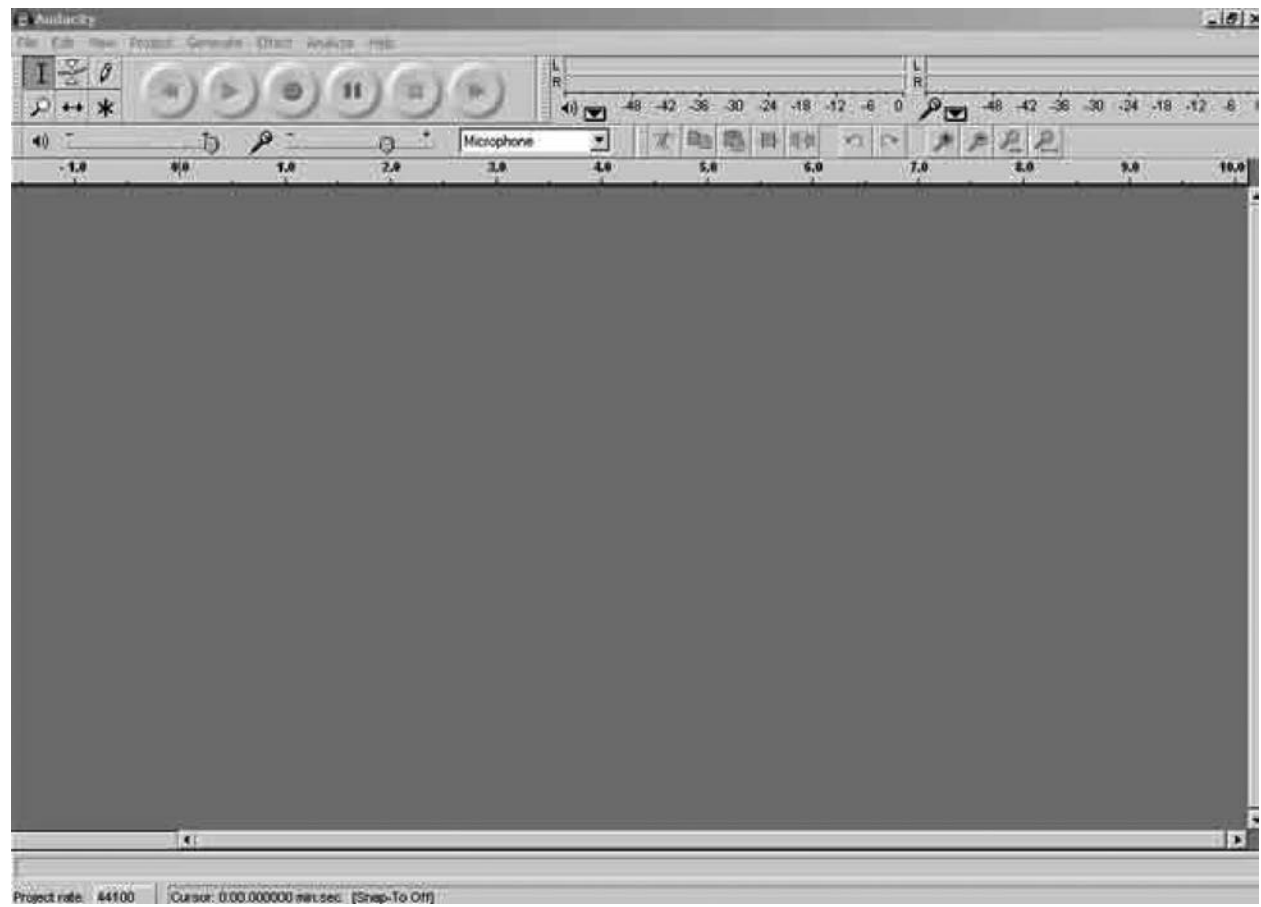
3. Go to the File menu and save as a project. (Figure 3)
4. Download LAME driver. Once downloaded, unzip and extract it to the folder where you installed Audacity (Under Program Files—Audacity). (Figure 4)
5. Go to the File menu and export the project as an MP3, a file that you can include in a blog or post to the Internet. (Figure 5)

Figure 1
Download the Audacity Program



Note. From the Audacity website audacity.sourceforge.net/download/.

Figure 2
Open Audacity



Note. From the Audacity website audacity.sourceforge.net/download/.

Additional screenshots and tutorials are available at www.guidesandtutorials.com/audacity-tutorial.html

As students engaged in the proof-revising process, the teacher asked them to revisit their story drafts. They each were to listen to the podcasts of their own stories. The students' task was to improve the fluency of the writing by paying attention to the following questions:

- Does my story flow?
- Does it make sense?
- Does it sound like I thought I had written it?
- Would I have read it the same way?

- Can punctuation help?
- Did misspellings or wording change my meanings?

To facilitate the task of reading and listening at the same time, students were instructed to open the podcast of their story on the class blog and to use their individual blogs to follow along. This required students to have two windows open. There was a lot of confusion on the first attempt. Some were mesmerized by the screen designs appearing on their podcast. Others did not know where to begin. The teacher suggested they follow along using a sheet of paper to track words across the screen as they

Figure 3
Save Project



Note. From the Audacity website audacity.sourceforge.net/download/.

listened. This time they realized they needed to pay attention. They listened again.

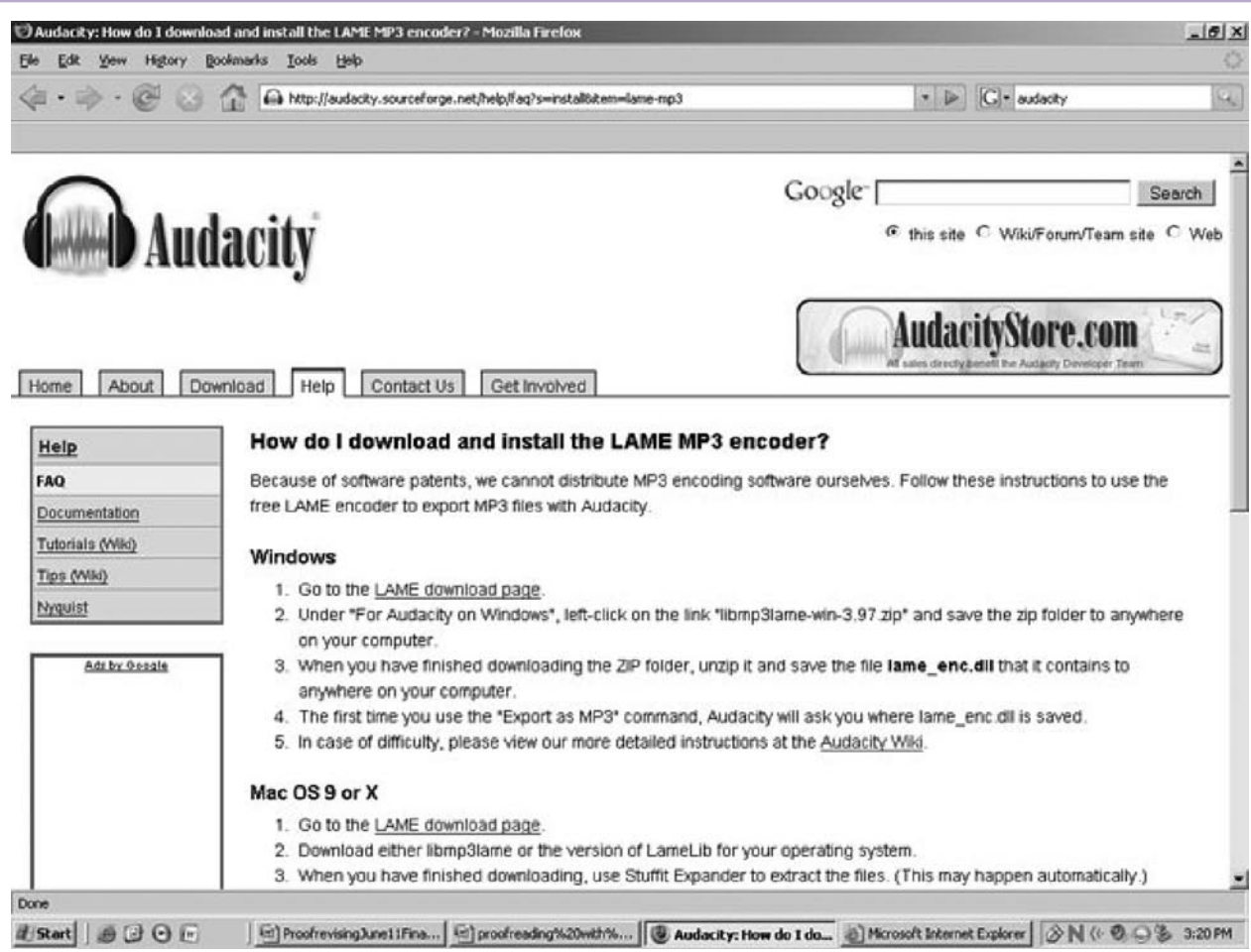
Students recognized how this helped their writing and communication. Michael (all names are pseudonyms) noticed, “I thought that I had no errors until I heard the podcast which said the mistakes.” M.V. realized, “mistakes can actually be useful because they tell you what you can improve on.” (All student quotes are unedited.)

Students began to develop self-monitoring habits. They were learning to notice how their writing sounded as it was written and to draw conclusions about how it should have looked in print to reflect their original intent. A class discussion followed, with

students sharing discoveries. Many were surprised to learn that their writing was not exactly as they had thought. Students found some errors humorous, but others were dismayed about their actual writing. They were beginning not only to understand the complexities of proof-revising but also to appreciate its value. This discussion culminated in students creating mini podcasts with proof-revising pointers for themselves and peers. The following are some examples of the advice they offered.

“You shouldn’t use the same word over and over again. You should change your words and make them more interesting to the reader.”

Figure 4
Download LAME Driver



Note. From the Audacity website: www.guidesandtutorials.com/audacity-lame.html.

“What I learned is to let somebody read your story, like to recheck your story.”

“Think about what you are going to write, like you need a brainstorm before you do anything else.”

“When you are writing, always pay attention.”

Leslie summarized the entire podcasting experience with her realization that reading her writing aloud had caused her to notice how it sounded to other readers unfamiliar with the text. The process resulted in her desire to be more careful and ensure that other readers could understand her writing.

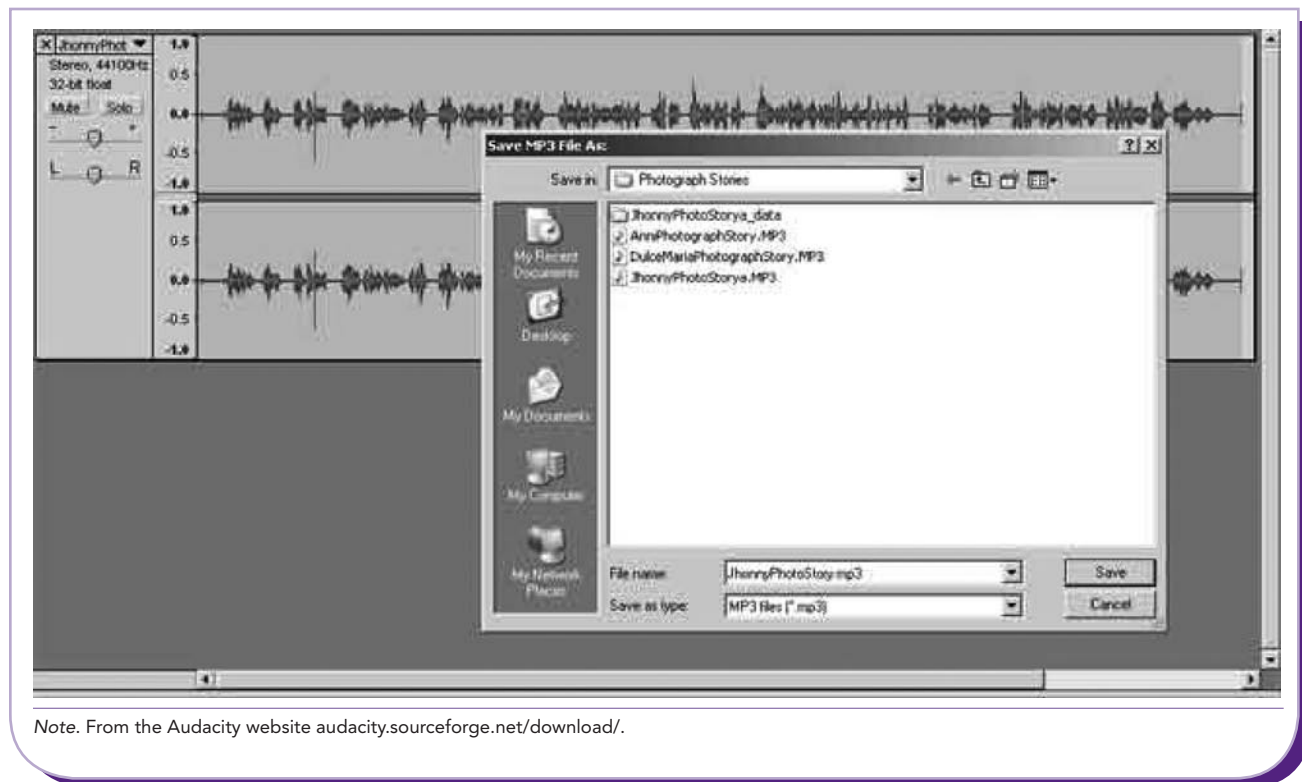
Students were proud of their new understandings and began to embrace the concept of proof-revising

to make meaning clearer to the reader. The teacher observed carry-over, as many students were reading aloud their revisions as well as brainstorming with classmates to make their writing effective and engaging for readers.

The Place of Podcasting in the Revision Process

Proof-revising is a complex literacy task that requires practice with a real audience in an authentic writing context such as classroom blogging. It is a challenge for students as well as teachers, but it is one that can improve student communication skills and literacies.

Figure 5
Export Project as MP3



It exemplifies seamless integration of technology with a complex thinking and learning task that goes beyond editing for surface errors to engage students in rereading, listening, thinking, and relating to the audience. Making the blogs and podcasts public lets others view students' responses and contribute additional improvements.

This approach is not one to be used daily in the classroom but rather used selectively and purposefully from time to time. Because a teacher's time is precious, the teacher may choose only excerpts from student writing for podcast reading. Ideally, excerpts selected should reflect areas of strength as well as weakness in each student's communication with the audience. This lets the teacher provide individual feedback. Although the use of strategies such as peer review or cue cards with questions should be continued to improve student revisions, proof-revising through podcasting is worth exploring further in our classrooms.

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Davis is an information systems training specialist at Georgia State University, Atlanta, USA; e-mail adavis@gsu.edu. McGrail teaches at Georgia State University; e-mail emcgrail@gsu.edu.

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